

poetry

Why the Woman Is Singing on the Corner: A Verse Narrative

by Dolores Kendrick

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Dolores Kendrick carefully peels back layers of memory, in the verse narrative *Why the Woman Is Singing on the Corner*. This beautiful, haunting, somewhat surreal collection is unique, like nothing in recent poetic verse.

Family stories culled from the main character Ophelia's consciousness, intertwine in these intimate poems. A connection is forged when the reader eavesdrops on an intense dream dialogue, between Phelia and her sister Garrah, who has died. The reader enters into the world of Phelia from the first two lines of the book.

Where are you now, old lady?
Garrah is meddling.

We learn through the gradual unfolding of the stories how completely one person, Phelia, can be affected by the complex psychology of abandonment and loss because of how deeply one loves. As Phelia's stories evolve, the reader senses a spiritual connection that predates religious conventions.

Stories her mother told of her ancestor, a slave woman named Jo run parallel to hers and give her a strange sense of hope. Garrah and Jo live on in Phelia's mind.

She wants to find Jo,
listen to Garrah,
give living things her life,
and her wish speaks back to her:
find the well, fetch,
draw, the water can accommodate you....

Eventually, a madness crowds Phelia's mind, spawned of grief not reconciled and so profound that the only real comfort for her and all the other sister-women that people these pages is found at the "well" and through owning the freedom to sing.

It is the widow's song
the mother's song,
the daughter's song,
the song of the first universe
born out of nothing
the sisters' song...

—Linda Joy Burke is a poet and
writer living in Baltimore.